

## Leaning tower of Teluk Intan

By SAGER AHMAD

Always compared to its more famous and older cousin, the Leaning Tower of Pisa in Italy, this 25.5m pagoda-like structure was built in 1885 by contractor and philanthropist Leong Choon Chong. There is a road named after him nearby.

The tower, originally used as a water tank, functioned as a landmark for people to meet. During World War II (1941-1945), the Japanese removed the roof tiles and used the tower as an observation post.

It is rumoured that the tower was constructed for feng shui reasons. It seemed that a rich Chinese merchant who controlled the trade along the Perak River consulted a feng shui master who advised him to build a huge storehouse at a strategic location with a commanding view of the traffic coming downriver in order to strengthen his business.

When the British District Officer heard this, he was disturbed and tried to counteract the move. He consulted another feng shui expert who suggested the construction of the clock tower.

The tower is something of an architectural curiosity. The outer part comprises a wooden "cage" made of cengal gayung wood but the inner structure is brick.

The wooden cage has 16 pillars with joints ingeniously fused using nuts and bolts. They rest on 16 marble slabs on top of the 16 pillars standing 1.5 metres tall.

The tower has only three floors, each five metres in height although from the outside, it appears to have eight storeys. The broad base of nearly 13m in width tapers off at the top to a width of 8.1m.

At the top is a five-metre tall bell-shaped water tank that can hold 206 cubic metres of water. A hole in the middle allowed a worker to climb up and treat the water with chlorine. A canal was dug from Sungai Perak to the tower and water pumped up to fill the tank.

According to residents, the British wanted to demolish the tower during World War II but averted the plan after vehement protests by the locals.

The British feared that Japanese warplanes would use the tower as a marker to bomb the town. Nevertheless, the tower was damaged during the war and restored in 1945.

The tower is not really in danger of toppling although it is tilted towards the town centre. Two professors from Universiti Sains Malaysia carried out studies and did restoration work under the supervision of the Museums and Antiquities Department in mid-1990.

The tower clock (about a century old) has two plates that read: J.W.Benson – Ludgatehill London and Clock Maker To The Queen & Prince Of Wales.